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SUBJECT: NATIONAL ASSEMBLY: JUNE 2 AND 3 SESSIONS

1. IN SESSIONS AFTERNOON JUNE 2 AND MORNING JUNE 3 NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATED POSSIBILITY OF CHANGING DATE OF THE SENATORIAL ELECTION FROM DECEMBER 17 TO COINCIDE WITH PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION IN SEPTEMBER. CHANGE WAS RECOMMENDED BY DIRECTORATE IN ITS MAY 26 MESSAGE TO ASSEMBLY AND WAS SUPPORTED BY A PETITION SIGNED BY 46 DEPUTIES, MOST OF THEM MEMBERS OF DEMOCRATIC-ALLIANCE BLOC.

2. PROPONENTS OF SINGLE ELECTION DATE FOR PRESIDENT AND SENATE ARGUED THAT IT WOULD SIMPLIFY SECURITY ARRANGEMENTS, WOULD BE MORE CONVENIENT FOR VOTERS, AND WOULD SPEED UP ESTABLISHMENT OF AGENCIES CALLED FOR IN CONSTITUTION. THEY ALSO EXPRESSED VIEW THAT ASSEMBLY SHOULD DEFER TO WISHES OF THE EXECUTIVE IN THIS MATTER SINCE EXECUTIVE BEARS RESPONSIBILITY FOR ORGANIZING AND PROTECTING THE ELECTIONS.

3. OPPONENTS OF CHANGE (INCLUDING MRS, GREATER PEOPLES BLOC AND MANY INDEPENDENTS) SAID THAT SENATE ELECTION IN SEPTEMBER WOULD GIVE CANDIDATES INSUFFICIENT TIME TO PREPARE THEIR CAMPAIGNS AND THAT CHOOSING PRESIDENT AND SENATE CANDIDATES AT SAME TIME WOULD BE TOO COMPLICATED FOR VOTERS. IN ADDITION

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THEY ARGUED THAT ELECTION OF SENATE AT SAME TIME AS PRESIDENT WOULD BE CONTRARY TO ARTICLE 116 OF CONSTITUTION WHICH SPECIFIES THAT NATIONAL ASSEMBLY MUST BE ESTABLISHED NO LATER THAN 12 MONTHS FROM THE DATE THE FIRST PRESIDENT ASSUMED OFFICE. (NGO THANH TUNG, WHO FAVORS BOTH ELECTIONS ON SAME DAY, POINTED OUT THAT ARTICLE 116 ONLY SETS AN OUTER LIMIT ON ELECTION OF SENATE. IT DOES NOT PROHIBIT ELECTION OF SENATE BEFORE PRESIDENT TAKES OFFICE.)

4. A THIRD ALTERNATIVE WHICH RECEIVED SOME SUPPORT WAS ELECTION OF SENATE AND HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES ON SAME DAY AFTER PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION. HOWEVER, IT WAS NOT PRESENTED IN FORM OF A PETITION AND WAS THEREFORE NOT PUT TO A VOTE.

5. DISCIPLINE, WHICH HAD HELD UP WELL DURING DEBATE, DISINTEGRATED RAPIDLY STURDAY MORNING WHEN IT CAME TIME TO VOTE ON THE DEMOCRATIC-ALLIANCE PETITION. DEPUTIES SUPPORTING THE PETITION CALLED FOR A ROLL-CALL VOTE, OPPONENTS FAVORED A SECRET BALLOT. ISSUE OF HOW TO VOTE WAS DECIDED BY A SHOW OF HANDS. RESULT WAS 47-47 TIE. CHAIRMAN PHAN KHAC SUU BROKE THE DEADLOCK BY OPTING FOR SECRET BALLOT, WHEREUPON TRAN THE MINH CONGRATULATED SUU FOR "STANDING ON THE SIDE OF THE PEOPLE." COL. DAM VAN QUY WAS OUTRAGED BY MINH'S REMARKS AND THREATENED TO KILL HIM. (QUY MADE A SIMILAR THREAT DURING CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY DEBATE ON THE ROLL OF THE MILITARY IN POLITICS WHEN MINH CALLED QUY "THE WORM THAT SPOILS THE SOUP.")

6. FOLLOWING TEN-MINUTE RECESS TO ALLOW TEMPERS TO COOL SUU CALLED FOR BALLOTING TO BEGIN. LE PHUOC SANG, APPARENTLY PLAYING FOR TIME TO RALLY HIS FORCES, ASKED THAT VOTE BE POSTPONED UNTIL MONDAY IN VIEW OF EMOTIONAL ATMOSPHERE PREVAILING. WHEN ASSEMBLY REJECTED HIS SUGGESTION SANG AND MOST MEMBERS OF HIS BLOC WALKED OUT. DEMOCRATIC-ALLIANCE PETITION WAS THEN DEFEATED IN SECRET BALLOT BY VOTE OF 45 TO 9 WITH ONE ABSTENTION.

7. ISSUE OF ELECTION DATES REMAINS IN DOUBT. SOME DEPUTIES (OPPONENTS OF DEMOCRATIC-ALLIANCE PETITION) ASSUME REJECTION OF PETITION MEANS DECEMBER 17 ELECTION OF SENATE IS FINAL. HOWEVER, ASSEMBLY SECRETARY-GENERAL NGO THANH TUNG SAID

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THAT MATTER WOULD PROBABLY BE REOPENED. TUNG ADDED THAT HE BELIEVES DIRECTORATE WILL EXERCISE ITS POWERS OF AMENDMENT IF ASSEMBLY CLINGS TO ITS PRESENT POSITION. IT IS ALSO POSSIBLE THAT ASSEMBLY WILL GIVE FURTHER CONSIDERATION TO ALTERNATIVE MENTIONED PARAGRAPH 4 ABOVE (ELECTION OF SENATE AND HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES ON SAME DAY).

8. ASSEMBLY WILL RECONVENE MONDAY JUNE 5, REPORTEDLY IN SECRET SESSION. ACCORDING TO NGO THANH TUNG DEPUTIES WILL DISCUSS WHAT THEY CONSIDER UNFAIR PRESS CAMPAIGN AGAINST ASSEMBLY.

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